

a woman. My business is with George Conway, and by your leave—or without it if worst comes to worst—I'm not going away from here without seeing him."

"Don't you believe me when I tell you that he's unconscious?" Daura asked in her soft, girl's voice.

She wore a blue tweed skirt, and a pale-blue blouse with a low sailor collar. Her hair, which she had not stopped to arrange for the day, hung in a thick plait, far below her waist, where its curly ends were tied together with a blue ribbon. Gazing piteously up at the man's face, her hands clasped nervously behind her back, she looked abashedly young. Troy clearly did not know what to make of her,—whether she was to be treated as a precocious child or a grown woman,—but he could not help seeing that she was beautiful. He did not care much about girls. He had always found that in the long run they did more harm than good to men. They were never of any use, and this one was very much in the way and very embarrassing. But he hoped that she was not going to cry. He had nothing against the girl herself, so far, and he couldn't bear to see a fragile-looking female thing squeezing the juice out of its eyes, because of words or deeds of his.

"I don't say I disbelieve what you tell me," he explained. "It wasn't being struck with my car that made him fall. What struck him was the sight of me."

"But why should he faint at sight of you?" Daura questioned, speaking gently. She was afraid of the man, for George's sake, and dared not offend him. Yet she must know what to expect. "Are you—his enemy?"

Troy's face hardened into sullen lines. "I told you my business was with him," he repeated.

"Now I know you're his enemy!" she cried. "But—oh, you wouldn't be, if you could see him as he is! My cousin and another man have just brought him into the house—into his own room. They hadn't come yet when the butler told me you were here. I was having things got ready for him. That was why I sent word for you to wait, and that's why I came to speak to you. Nobody else knows yet what's happened, except those two who carried him up to the house, and the butler, whom you saw. This was to have been the wedding day. I shall have to tell my sister."

"It looks as if you had to do pretty well everything in this house, Lady Score!" It seemed to Daura that he sneered.

"I'm not Lady Score," she said. "I'm only Daura Score. You may call me Lady Daura, if you please."

"I don't know anything about titles," he replied, with a grim little laugh. "You wouldn't be surprised at that, if I told you what my life's been up to now. But look here, Lady Daura, I've got to see Conway! I've traveled a good many thousand miles to do it—just that—and a little more. I came first to England, then here. When I read in the London papers that he'd bought an auto to go touring in, I bought one too, so I could follow if I missed him today. You see by all that it's not likely I'll let him get away from me in the end."

IT may be a long time, I'm afraid, before he can even move," Daura sighed. "I'm afraid he's very ill."

"Worse things might happen to him than being ill."

"He might die!"

"Yes. He might—die!"

"Mr. Troy, you frighten me," the girl said, trying to speak in a tone as quiet, if not so deadly, as his.

"I'm sorry. But as you will mix yourself up in this business, it can't be helped. I'm only speaking the way I do to show you once for all I'm not to be put off. I've come here to meet Conway face to face, and here I stay till I have done my errand, if I have to hold up all the men folks of your family and all the police on your island."

"Have you come here to take revenge on George for something he has done?" she asked. "If you have, surely you might be satisfied now! Whatever it was that happened this morning, whether your car struck him, or—"

"You can cut that out, my Lady Daura."

"—or whether it was only the sight of you, it amounts to the same thing. He was well. He was happy—"

"I doubt he was happy. I don't believe even George Conway's got enough brass and iron in him for that."

"Why—why shouldn't he be happy?"

"The reason why has got nothing to do with you, you can thank your lucky stars!"

"It has to do with my sister."

"Then I pity her. But she'll live to bless the day George Conway went out of her life."

Daura felt very cold, as if an icy wind was blowing over her. "But he makes the happiness of her life. And I won't believe anything against him said by a stranger," she protested loyally.

"I don't ask you to believe anything against him. The thing's between Conway and me—for the present. If others have to suffer with him, that's his fault, not mine. You say today was to be his wedding day. Well, I'll tell you this much: You and yours ought to be down on your knees thanking whatever God you pray to that you can say 'was,' not 'is!' I've come just in time."

"You are cruel!" the girl exclaimed. And she thought that after all he was a man not of fire, but of ice.

"Cruel! Great King! you don't know the meaning of the word! Don't rouse me up too much, though, or maybe I'll lose hold of myself, and—tell you. Sleeping dogs are better left to lie. I wish you'd sent me some man to talk to. By this time I'd have been where George Conway is, or he'd have been here with me."

"I'll go and find out if he's come back to consciousness," said Daura. "By this time, I hope, the doctor may be with him. If—if you don't believe me, would you like to see the doctor—by and by?" she quickly added. He must not meet the doctor now! The news of George's progress might be too favorable, and then this terrible man would force himself upon his enemy at once. Somehow she must make time.

"If you tell me, on your honor as a lady, that Conway fell down in a fit or a faint at sight of me, and lay in the road till someone brought him up here, I'll believe you," Troy said. "And I'll believe he hasn't come back to himself, if you say on your honor that it's true. But it will only make things worse if you deceive me."

"I do tell you this on my honor," Daura repeated. "And, whatever your feeling against George is, whether right or wrong, remember one thing: My sister loves him—worships him, Mr. Troy!"

"I'm sorry to hear that," he said, subsiding again into sullen coldness. His words might as well have been, "I can't help that. It won't change anything."

Daura read this as his inner meaning. But she had not given up hope. She'll not even take time to puzzle over the mystery of the man's coming. She was too intent on saving the situation—for Annira—at any cost.

SO it is, with my sister, for good or ill," she went on.

"I've told you, because I have to ask your patience—for her sake. And even if George has injured you, she's done you no harm. You can't want to hurt her."

"I don't want to hurt her, nor you, nor anyone in this house, except George Conway."

"Then you do want to hurt him?"

"I want to do justice. And I will do it! Nothing can keep me from that."

"What I was trying to say," Daura hurried on, "is this: You don't wish to hurt my sister; so you'll let me go and find out how George is now, and tell her what has happened: not the part that concerns you, except that it was your motorcar. Please let me do all this, even before I come back and give you any news there may be! I promise that I'll tell you exactly what the doctor says; but first I must see my sister, or she will hear of the accident from somebody else."

"The accident! That's what you're going to call it?"

"That's what I thought it was. Annira had better think so too—as long as she can. Even you can't object to that."

"No, I don't object. But how do I know you aren't planning to smuggle Conway out of the house, and give him the chance to go scot free?"

"I thought you said you believed me!"

"I did say so; but the temptation might be too big for you, and then—"

"The temptation to smuggle George away? Don't you see, that would be no use to my sister? I think of her more than of George. There'd be a horrid scandal if the bridegroom disappeared on the wedding day. She couldn't bear it. You needn't be afraid that I'll try to help him in any such way as that. I'd take you to his room, and let you see him lying there; but just now my cousin Captain MacRimmon is with him, and probably the doctor. If George hasn't come to himself, they'd think it very strange, seeing you. If he has, the surprise might make him say or do something before them that would be—terrible for our family. Let the meeting be when you two are alone."

"That's what I want. But I want it to be soon. Look here, if I wait where I am, and trust you not to serve me any underhand trick, will you be back in ten minutes?"

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS

IT was early morning of the wedding day of George Conway, an American, and Lady Annira Score, daughter of Lord Gorme, at Dunelm Castle, in the Highlands of Scotland. Conway had returned after a year's absence with half a million dollars; for Lord Gorme had refused to permit the marriage unless he should earn a hundred thousand within that time. Daura, Annira's sister, was awakened by the "skirling of fairy pipes," the castle's historic premonition of dire tragedy. She rushed out of the house, and found Conway standing in the road nearby.

A strange red motorcar dashed by, and Conway, though apparently not struck, fell back unconscious. He was secretly carried into the castle. Only two faithful servants and Alastair MacRimmon, Daura's would-be fiancé, knew of the accident. Then Daura was summoned to the reception hall to meet Robert Troy, one of the occupants of the red automobile, who had crossed the ocean to find Conway.

"Give me twenty. First I must speak with the doctor, before I go to Annira. My sister's room is a long way off, and when I get there I'll have to break the news of the accident gently. I can't blurt it all out in three words. Let us look at our watches now, and see that they're together. Then, if I'm more than a minute over the twenty, I give you leave to pull the bell and tell the servant who answers it that Lady Daura wishes you to be taken up to Mr. Conway's room—that you're a friend of his."

"Nothing on earth would induce me to call him my friend. I've told several kinds of lies in my time; but if I told that one I'd deserve to have my tongue cut out."

"I spoke without thinking," Daura pleaded. "Say what you like to the servant, if you have to ring. But you won't have to." She showed Troy a watch she wore, in a bracelet on the right wrist. His watch was faster. She put hers ahead two minutes. And then she ran to Conway's room—literally ran, for every second was of value.

MACDONALD'S just arrived," Alastair MacRimmon told her, at the door. "He's given Conway something, and he seems to be waking up. He's opened his eyes once or twice, and sighed, but hasn't spoken."

"May I come in?" Daura asked, without making the expected comment on Alastair's good news.

"If you like," But won't you wait till—"

"I can't wait," the girl insisted. "I must have something definite to say, when I tell Nira what's happened. Alastair, will you, like a dear kind boy, go now to Father and break the news to him?"

"Haden't I too better wait for something definite?" he demurred.

"It doesn't matter so much for Father. Say George is coming to himself. But—this is the great thing: Don't let Father come here, or go to Nira, for—for another twenty minutes. Oh, dear Alastair, do this for me now, without waiting a second!"

"All right. I'll do it." He consented: not because he approved of Daura's whirlwind way of disposing of him and managing things in general, but because Daura was Daura, and he wanted a reward for pleasing her. She was an almost quixotically grateful girl, and when you did anything at all difficult at her request you were sure of being paid as much as the concession was worth or more.

Daura could hardly wait till Alastair's back was turned, before shutting the door. Then she went softly to the bedside, where Dr. MacDonald had just emptied the contents of a tiny medicine glass, holding no more than a teaspoon, between Conway's lips. Daura drew come faintly back to the pale face, and as Daura drew near the blue eyes opened wide. Dazed for an instant, they brightened at sight of her,—brightened not with a happy light, but with a distressful intelligence, as if to remember what unendurable pain.

"Daura!" he gasped. "You were with me when—"

"Yes," she caught him up quickly. "And I'm going to help you now."

"Hurrah!" said Dr. MacDonald, a jolly, brown little man, like a fat sparrow. "I believe we'll bring him round as right as rain; and we shall have the wedding today, after all! He doesn't seem to have any broken bones, so far as I can find. I've been testing his heart, and upon my word I believe there's nothing radically wrong! It may be that long journey by land and sea, and too much excitement, or something or other that's disagreed with him, has—"

FOR God's sake, Doctor, leave me alone with Lady Daura a minute, will you?" George broke in.

"There's something I want to tell her."

Surprised, perhaps a little hurt, Dr. MacDonald's bright brown eyes, behind thick-rimmed glasses, sought counsel from Daura.

"I think I know what he wants to say," the girl ventured. "I think you do what he asks—and forgive us both? It's—it's something that concerns my sister, and it must be arranged at once. I won't let him exert himself—don't be afraid. It will do him good to speak."

"Oh, certainly, certainly!" MacDonald agreed. "I'll go outside."

"No, please!" Daura was thinking quickly. If he went outside, he might see someone, and set the news flying round the house that Conway was better, that perhaps the wedding need not be postponed, after all. "You know," she explained, "we don't want anyone questioning you yet. There's a kind of dressing room off this. Will you wait there?"

She opened a door into what had in old days been a closet for powdering the hair. It was a tiny room, and Conway's trunk and a suitcase occupied a third of the space. But there was a chair, and a view of the sea from a narrow window. Softly Daura closed the door and shut the doctor in. Then she went back to George, who had lifted himself on his elbow.

"On the dressing table you'll find a little green morocco box," he said in a strained voice. "Give it to me, please."

The girl went to the table, and found the box, which